

THE DOCTRINES OF THE BIBLE: ELECTION AND CALLING



Election and Vocation (Calling) (Thiessen, 1949) is the Biblical doctrine of the salvation of the soul. There are some rather controversial thoughts on the subject, but the most important aspect to remember is that it is not God's will that anyone should perish, but that all should repent and be saved:

⁹The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. – **2 Peter 3:9**

It is clear from this verse that the idea that people were pre-elected to be saved and others to perish, as if neither group had any choice in the matter, is false.

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

We can generally classify God's plan for the salvation of man as follows: God decreed to

- create man in His own image;
- permit the fall in Paradise;
- offer in Christ redemption that is sufficient for all;
- elect those who accepted the call of salvation; and
- send the Holy Spirit to secure the acceptance of redemption on the part of the elect.

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We have to deal with the question whether God chose some to obtain salvation while others are left to perish. In His omniscience, God knew beforehand who would respond to the call of salvation and thus offer them salvation. It is simple really: You ask, and you get. If you prefer not to ask, then you cannot expect to get. This is due to the free will of man. God has given us the ability to make decisions. However, those decisions have effects. It is never God's will that anyone should perish, but that everyone should be saved. That is His perfect will for your life. If you decide not to accept the offer of salvation, He allows it, as His allowed will.

ELECTION

Election is the act whereby God chooses some persons or even nations to accomplish some task. Examples of election are of **nations**:

¹I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, ²That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. ³For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ **for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: ⁴Who are Israelites**; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; ⁵Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen. – **Romans 9:1-5**

Israel was elected as a nation to have special favour with God, not because He is unfair, but because He can. While we know that through the ages, they have often declined the special privileges He has offered them and are currently living almost as exiles, He is not done with them yet and they will receive their Messiah soon. In the time that they have turned away from God, He has extended His grace to the gentiles:

¹¹He came unto his own, and his own received him not. ¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name. – **John 1:11-12**

In this verse, “**His own**” represent Israel and “**as many**” represent the gentiles, as well as any Israelites that responded to His call.

The next example is that of **position**:

²⁶He sent Moses his servant; and Aaron whom he had chosen. – **Psalm 105:26**

Moses and Aaron were specifically chosen for a specific task, in this case leading Israel out of Egypt and bondage, into Canaan and freedom.

He calls specific people to **apostleship**:

¹³And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles; ¹⁴Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew, ¹⁵Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes, ¹⁶And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor. – **Luke 6:13-16**

In terms of our salvation, it transcends the borders of nations, race, gender, language and current standing and is free for all who respond.

Because of the fall of man, God is under no obligation to offer salvation to anyone. However, since one of His decrees is to offer Jesus Christ as redemption to all mankind, He will pursue this route. This is grace in its purest form:

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: ⁴According as **he hath chosen us in him** before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: ⁵Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved. – **Ephesians 1:3-6**

He chose us in Christ because in ourselves we have already proven to be unworthy. There are some very important statements made in these verses:

- We were chosen **by God** – by whom;
- We were chosen **in Christ** – through whom;

- We were chosen **before the world was made** – the decision was taken before the world was made. Think about it – God knew your name before any seas or continents were formed;
- We were **predestinated** – by God’s intervention and interest in our lives;
- We were **adopted by Jesus Christ** – Jesus Christ made us real sons and daughters;
- We were **adopted by Jesus Christ to Him** – Jesus Christ adopted us so that we could be reconciled to God the Father;
- We were **adopted by God because of His will** – this was God’s decision, and the offer was available to all; and
- We were **accepted** – the result is that we are now full citizens of heaven, signed and sealed, and not temporary residents.

PRESCIENCE

As indicated earlier, there has always been a debate whether God is in fact unfair and that there are some who were simply not pre-elected and thus excluded from salvation. At the same time, the opposite is that there will be some that have been pre-elected and that thus no matter what they do or do not do, they are saved. If we say that the election of man is based on God’s prescience, it means that He knew (-science) before (pre-) the time who would be saved and thus ensured that the way is prepared for them.

Where the argument of prescience is held, it is because grace is available to everyone:

¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all men**, ¹²Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. – **Titus 2:11-14**

Take a moment to savour the rest of the text. First, God’s grace is available for all. Next, once we have accepted it, we are asked to live Godly lives. Then, we are to be on the lookout for His coming (the rapture) which is our escape from the wrath to befall unbelievers in the not-too-distant future.

Even though on our own we can never procure our own salvation, God has not cast us away but has made the perfect plan. Before the sinner even gets to be evangelised, there would have been several ways the truth could reach them – the media, the lives of other believers, and, most important of all, the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. We learned in the previous lesson on soteriology that the Holy Spirit works in the lives of sinners long before they get to the point of giving over their lives to Jesus Christ.

In addition to God’s grace being available to all, the Bible is clear that Christ died for all men:

⁵For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; ⁶Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time. – **Timothy 2:5-6**

There are also many examples that people are called to repentance and turn to God:

¹¹For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to **all men**. – **Titus 2:11**

Since God is just and fair, it is only reasonable that He would foresee a situation where sinful man simply cannot help himself and as such, the plan of salvation must be readily available. Even more than being just and fair, God is a God of love and loving is an action that is central to His character. No more is this more evident than here:

¹⁶For God so **loved the world**, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. – **John 3:16-17**

The highlighted part does not differentiate between good and bad people. We have all sinned and cannot radiate the glory of God:

²¹But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; ²²Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: ²³**For all have sinned**, and come short of the glory of God. – **Romans 3:21-23**

Many will argue that there is a problem with this view in that not all people have been exposed to the gospel. This is exactly why we are commissioned to spread the gospel any way we can – whether by going there and preaching the Word, or by using whatever platform you have at your disposal. In fact, the very text you are reading here comes by way of a publicly available website. If it is not possible to spread the gospel in person, we need to use whatever methods are available to us.

CHOICE

Choice is the one thing that lands us in so much hot water. God has given each of us a choice to do what is right, or to choose to do the opposite. Many will argue that God also has a choice to decide who to save and who to condemn, but that would be contrary to His nature. It is not His choice that anyone perishes. At the end of the day, we as humans live or die by the choices we make, in the light of the opportunities available to us. To illustrate this, read the account of the rich young man:

¹⁶And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? ¹⁷And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. ¹⁸He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, ¹⁹Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ²⁰The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? ²¹Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. ²²But when the young man heard that saying, **he went away sorrowful**: for he had great possessions. – **Matthew 19:16-22**

Despite teaching by the Master Teacher, the young man left without accepting the offer to follow Jesus. Was this because there was a problem with the message? The message is the same for everyone and therefore the only difference could be with the hearer of the Word. This was the man's choice, the decision he made not to heed the message, and he had to live with the consequences.

At the time, this man would not have known about the atonement what would be made by Jesus, but in our time, we have no excuse. Of course, by not accepting it, we are limiting the *effectiveness* of the offer, but it does not limit the *validity* of the offer in any way. It does not mean that this offer will never be available to anyone again who once rejected it, but they have certainly lost an opportunity and have no guarantee that it will come their way again. In my life, God's grace was more than sufficient, and He was certainly more than patient. I turned down the offer for salvation twice before accepting it on the third occasion. Others may not be so lucky.

CALLING

God calls us to repent. He invites us. All we must do is to obey the call:

¹⁹I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live. – **Deuteronomy 30:19**

When we look at the background for the text above, Moses is giving instructions to the nation who would soon enter the promised land. He is speaking on behalf of God here. Not only does he present them with both options but also suggests which one they should choose instead. God has already provided us with the best option, but we still have the choice whether we will accept it or not.

The offer of life is made to all people – those who are **weary**:

²⁸Come unto me, **all ye that labour and are heavy laden**, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light. – **Matthew 11:28-20**

whoever **believes in Him** (John 3:16):

¹⁶For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever believeth in him** should not perish, but have everlasting life. ¹⁷For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. – **John 3:16-17**

and to **people everywhere**:

²²Look unto me, and be ye saved, **all the ends of the earth**: for I am God, and there is none else. – **Isaiah 45:22**

How sad is it then, when those who God held in high esteem, those He really wanted to accept the offer, **Israel**, did not accept the invitation:

¹⁰He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. ¹¹He came unto **his own**, and his own received him not. ¹²But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: ¹³Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. – **John 1:10-13**

In the quoted text, “his own” refer to Israel, and the Jewish leaders refused to acknowledge the Messiah. Not only did they not accept Him, but made every effort that nobody else did, either. Thus, the opportunity was given to others.

PURPOSE

The purpose of God’s call is twofold:

God’s call is not for us to do extraordinary things, although because of obeying the call, extraordinary things may be done. He simply calls to do two things:

to **repent**:

¹In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea, ²And saying, **Repent** ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. – **Matthew 3:1-2**

and to **believe**:

²⁹Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God, that ye **believe** on him whom he hath sent. – **John 6:29**

From repentance and faith should come forth good works, a changed life, involvement in the activities of the organised church, and spiritual growth.

METHOD

There are many ways to call man. It can be through **the Word**:

¹⁵And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! ¹⁶But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? ¹⁷So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. – **Romans 10:15-17**

by His **Holy Spirit** (the Comforter):

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the **Comforter** will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. ⁸ And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: ⁹ Of sin, because they believe not on me; ¹⁰ Of righteousness,

because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; 11 Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. – **John 16:7-11**

by using His **servants**:

²The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, ³And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. ⁴Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. ⁵But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: ⁶And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. ⁷But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. ⁸Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. ⁹Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. ¹⁰So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. – **Matthew 22:2-9**

and by **showing His love** to people:

⁴Or despisest thou the riches of his **goodness** and **forbearance** and **longsuffering**; not knowing that the **goodness** of God leadeth thee to repentance? – **Romans 2:4**

CONCLUSION

If you are reading this as an unbeliever today, do not delay. This day may be your only chance. You do not know what tomorrow will bring or if you will even be alive. Let us look at the two other crosses on the hill and examine the attitudes of those on either side of the Saviour:

³⁹And **one of** the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. ⁴⁰But **the other** answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? ⁴¹And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. ⁴²And he said unto Jesus, **Lord, remember me** when thou comest into thy kingdom. ⁴³And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. – **Luke 23:39-43**

There are two people crucified at the same time as Jesus. Both were malefactors – sinners, convicted, with no hope of escape. Their circumstances were the same. The difference is in the attitude. One of them (39), at the point of death, curses and somehow blames everybody else for his circumstances. The other (40), realising his predicament, understands in this late hour his need for a Saviour and cries out to Jesus to remember him (42) when He enters His Kingdom. Both had the same opportunity. Jesus died for both the left and the right. They were on either side of the Saviour. Only one made use of it. One will end up in hell, eternally damned. The other will end up in **paradise, this day** (43), forever saved! The latter needed only to repent, and his reward was eternal life. In our next lesson, we look at the process of conversion.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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